

Customer Service

TIPS FOR INTERACTING WITH VISITORS

INTRODUCTION

It is our goal to satisfy our visitors' needs. You may be the only contact a guest has with the ALPLM, so it is imperative that each contact gives our guests just what they need, just when they need it. Below is information on customer service concepts, techniques, and strategies that will help you understand our guests and help our guests understand you.

WHAT IS GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE?



Good customer service is about sending our guests away pleased with their experience and hoping to return, pleased enough to give their friends, family, neighbors, and acquaintances a positive review enticing them to visit the ALPLM as well. How does this work for us at the ALPLM? It means providing information, solving our guests' problems and issues, and answering their questions in ways that meets their needs.

The ALPLM provides services to a wide range of guests that require individualized attention. On any day, you may deal with:

- people wishing to research their family history in the ALPL
- tourists wanting a fun day out
- tourists from other countries wanting to experience Lincoln history
- school groups wanting to investigate the ALPM to help with their studies.

Each of these groups may require a different approach to give them what they need so that they can connect to the ALPLM. The following techniques and strategies can help you get to the root of our visitors needs and issues and provide exceptional customer service.

ASSESSING GUEST NEEDS

The first order of business is to figure out exactly what guests need. You must not only understand their words but read guests' cues to provide the best customer service you can. Providing a long and in-depth answer to a visitor seeking only basic information will lead to an unsatisfactory guest experience. Putting the cues together with your knowledge of the ALPLM will lead to a positive outcome.

Techniques and strategies that will help you understand guests and their needs include reading body language, actively listening, and being aware of cultural differences.

BODY LANGUAGE & NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOR

Over fifty percent of communication is non-verbal so it is imperative that we both give and receive the proper messages. Properly reading our guests' cues will help you tailor the length and depth of your answer to their needs. Some elements of non-verbal communication include

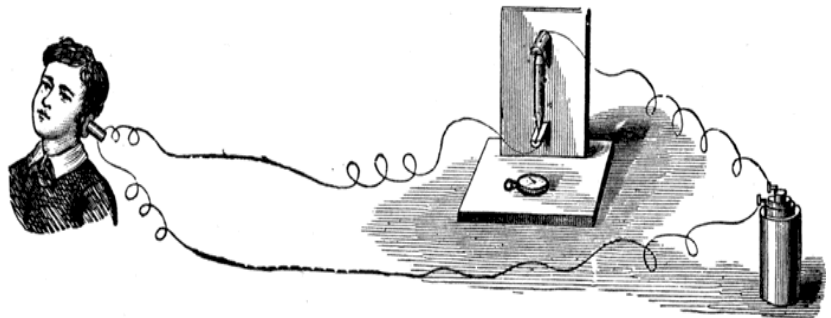


- eye contact
- volume
- closeness
- gestures
- facial expression
- intonation
- posture
- touch

Use signs like these to decide what level of information to offer. An attentive guest that is interested in more details may nod, maintain eye contact, smile, make interest noises (uh huh, mmm, OK), and lean forward or move closer to you. That visitor may want a five-minute explanation of the significance of the battle of Gettysburg. On the other hand, a guest that is bored may look away, stand with crossed arms or legs, try to move away, yawn, or display repetitive actions such as toe tapping or finger drumming.

LISTENING

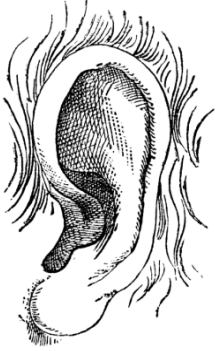
We have one mouth but two ears. That is a good indication of the amount of speaking we should do compared to listening. Listening is a skill and there are techniques that will make you a better listener and therefore provide better customer service to our guests.



A very useful skill for understanding others is active listening—a skill in which you show that you understand what the speaker is saying both verbally and nonverbally. It does not mean that you agree with what the other person is saying but rather that you understand what he or she is saying. You use encouraging words and attentive body language to listen for meaning.

Active listening can be summarized in three easy steps: you must pay attention, show that you are listening, and provide feedback.

Pay attention by giving the speaker your undivided attention. Look directly at the speaker and do not become distracted by other thoughts and what is going on around you. Carefully watch the speaker's body language to see if it reinforces or contradicts the speaker's words.



Show that you are listening by using your own body language to convey interest. Nod, smile, and encourage the other with small verbal comments that do not interrupt the speaker.

Finally, provide feedback to the speaker. Reflect back what the speaker has said to ensure that your biases, filters, and understandings have not colored what you have heard. Say things like, "What I hear you saying," and "If I understand correctly," and then paraphrase the speaker's comments. Ask questions and summarize occasionally to stay on track but do not interrupt.

It is difficult to be an effective listener and we all have barriers that prevent us from doing it as well as we might.

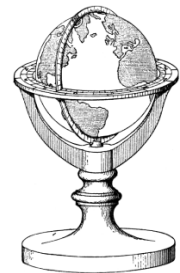
- Do not assume that you know the answer before you hear the entire question. Keep an open mind and do not judge.
- Do not try to be TOO helpful. This includes thinking that you know what the other person is about to ask as well as trying to solve the guest's problem before he/she has completely articulated it. Instead of jumping in before a person has finished, give him/her the courtesy of listening to the entire question.
- You do not need to impress. This frequently leads to planning your next statement in advance while not really listening.

Active listening, when mastered can have a positive impact on all parts of your life, not just on your encounters and interactions with guests at the ALPLM.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Visitors to the ALPLM come from around the United States and the world, from small rural villages to cities with millions. It is important to understand how these characteristics affect both verbal and nonverbal communication.

Notions of personal space are different between rural and urban people. Guests from large cities may have a much smaller area of personal space than someone from a rural area. Gestures are too variable to list but a few include such simple actions as pointing. In the United States it is common to point with the index finger, while Germans may use the little finger and many Asians will use the entire hand because finger pointing is rude.



Many western cultures see direct eye contact as positive. Many Asian, African, Latin-American, and Caribbean cultures do not give direct eye contact as a sign of respect.

In most cases, it is inappropriate to touch guest. However, should a situation arise where touching a guest is necessary, be careful as it can elicit very strong emotions in others. Even in cultures with few specific taboos relating to touch, it is a very personal experience and many simply do not like to be touched. Many religions forbid touch between genders. Touching with the left hand is very disrespectful in Middle Eastern cultures.

It is impossible to list each and every cultural difference, but these examples show that we should try to identify our cultural biases so that they do not get in the way of good communication.